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Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali

I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 2364 (2017), the Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) until 30 June 2018 and requested me to report on a quarterly basis on its implementation, focusing on progress in taking forward the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali (see S/2015/364 and S/2015/364/Add.1) and the efforts of MINUSMA to support it.

II. Major political developments

2. On 30 December, the President of Mali, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, appointed Soumeylou Boubèye Maiga as Prime Minister. On 16 January, the signatory parties agreed on a timeline to accelerate the implementation of key provisions of the Agreement ahead of the presidential elections in July, but progress towards implementation has remained slow. Meanwhile, the newly appointed Government has been working with stakeholders, including the signatory armed groups, to foster conditions conducive to the holding of peaceful, credible and transparent elections throughout the country. The 24th session of the Agreement Monitoring Committee was postponed to allow time for the Malian parties to finalize their discussion on an agreement detailing the activities to be carried out before and after the presidential elections. Significant progress was made towards the operationalization of the joint force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), for which more than €400 million has now been pledged, including the sum raised at the International High-Level Conference on the Sahel, held in Brussels on 23 February.

3. During the reporting period, some progress was achieved on the benchmarks developed by the Government of Mali and MINUSMA for monitoring the implementation of the Agreement, notably on defence and security, political and institutional matters and humanitarian and development measures. Achievements include the adoption of laws establishing territorial communities in the regions of Ménaka and Taoudenni, progress in the devolution of competencies and resources to the regions and the securing of additional funds for the United Nations trust fund for peace and security in Mali. The drafting of the national strategy on security sector reform is ongoing. No significant progress was made on the justice and reconciliation indicators. Slight progress was registered on the justice indicators relating to the prosecution of terrorism and prison security. A detailed matrix of the benchmarks is available on the Mission's website (https://minusma.unmissions.org/matrices).

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A. Implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali

4. During its regular session on 16 January, the Agreement Monitoring Committee endorsed a timeline, developed by the signatory parties with the support of MINUSMA, to accelerate the implementation of key provisions of the Agreement, focusing on measures related to: (a) decentralization, involving the harmonization of laws on territorial communities with the provisions of the Agreement; (b) defence and security, including mixed patrols, security sector reform and securing the upcoming elections; and (c) socioeconomic development. The Malian parties established ad hoc commissions to advance the implementation of the Agreement in all three areas.

5. For the first time since its designation as independent observer, the Carter Center attended the session of the Agreement Monitoring Committee on 16 January and stated its commitment to upholding independence and impartiality in carrying out its mandate. From 22 to 24 January, the delegation of the Carter Center visited Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu, and held meetings with State representatives, interim authorities and civil society.

Political and institutional measures

6. On 30 December, the President appointed Soumeylou Boubèye Maiga as Prime Minister. He is the fifth Prime Minister to be appointed during the President's mandate. On the same day, a new Cabinet was named. With 9 women out of its 36 members, it continues to fall short of the 30 per cent quota for the representation of women required by the law of 18 December 2015. In a bid to reinforce the decentralization process, two new ministries, the Ministry of Territorial Communities and the Ministry of Local Development, were created to work in conjunction with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization.

7. Shortly after his nomination, the new Prime Minister reached out to the signatory armed groups with a view to reinvigorating the implementation of the peace process and to the majority and opposition political parties, religious leaders and trade unions to reinforce the social dialogue. On 13 and 14 January, he travelled to Algeria to discuss the peace process and bilateral cooperation with the President, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, and the Prime Minister, Ahmed Ouyahia. On 11 February, he travelled to Mopti where he announced measures to restore State authority and deliver peace dividends to the people.

8. On 31 December, the President announced that his Government would draft a law of national understanding, which would offer amnesty to individuals who had been involved in an armed rebellion, but who had not been not accused of violent crimes. On 5 March, human rights groups published an open letter calling on the Government to put the law on hold pending the conduct of impartial investigations into human rights abuses committed since 2012. On 6 March, the Prime Minister received a draft law, which would be considered by the National Assembly in April.

9. Extensive government consultations on a decree to be adopted by the Council of Ministers on the transfer of authority for the delivery of services and associated financial resources to regional authorities are ongoing with the signatory armed groups and other key stakeholders. While this decree will facilitate the decentralization process, interim authorities are still facing significant technical, infrastructural and logistical challenges, and additional funds need to be mobilized for the implementation of their priority action plans. On 9 and 10 February in Taoudenni and from 27 February to 1 March in Kidal, the Mission and the United Nations Development Programme provided training to representatives of the interim authorities, government officials and civil society representatives on the management

of administrative and financial issues, as well as on procurement and project management.

10. The number of State officials redeployed to the northern and central regions decreased by 6 per cent during the reporting period. As at 1 March, only 22 per cent of State officials were present at their duty stations in the northern regions and in Mopti Region. The governors of all the northern regions have been deployed to their respective duty stations, except the governor of Taoudenni, who continues to work from Timbuktu.

11. Since the previous reporting period, there has been a slight decrease in the redeployment of judicial and prison officials to northern and central Mali. As at 10 March, only 69 per cent of judicial officials and 37 per cent of penitentiary officials in the northern regions, and 96 per cent of judicial officials and 92 per cent of penitentiary officials in Mopti Region, were present at their assigned posts. The deteriorating security situation resulted in 6.5 per cent of appointed officials remaining in another jurisdiction and both a slight increase in absenteeism and a slight decrease in activities such as court hearings.

12. Regional, district and municipal elections are scheduled to be held in April, presidential elections in July and August and legislative elections in November and December. In this context, my Special Representative held a number of meetings with key figures in Malian politics, the political opposition, civil society and the signatory groups, urging restraint and dialogue in support of the electoral process. In addition, the Mission organized workshops aimed at preventing and mitigating potential election-related violence that could stem from growing insecurity, intercommunity tensions and limited State presence in Bamako, Gao, Kidal, Mopti, Ségou and Timbuktu, benefiting over 600 national stakeholders, 40 per cent of whom were women. It also facilitated the training of 703 elections mediators, including 225 women, who will serve as members of community-based mediation panels.

Defence and security measures

13. The signatory parties agreed on integration criteria and quotas for internal security institutions and the civil service, but continue to diverge on quotas for the Malian armed forces and on a long-term vision of the security sector reform. The full operationalization of the mixed units of the Operational Coordination Mechanism in Kidal and Timbuktu will be the first phase in the reconstitution and redeployment of Malian defence and security forces in the northern regions.

14. On 28 February, the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process saw some progress with the beginning of the pre-registration phase for the identification and listing of all eligible combatants of the signatory movements by the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission, in collaboration with MINUSMA. At the meeting of the Agreement Monitoring Committee held on 15 and 16 January, all parties agreed to complete the pre-registration within two months.

15. On 7 March, the National Assembly approved the national border policy and action plan. In parallel, the Security Sector Reform Commissariat developed its work plan for 2018 and is currently working with the National Council for Security Sector Reform to develop a national security sector reform strategy for the coming years. MINUSMA continues to assist the General Directorate of Territorial Communities in the development of regulations for the territorial police.

16. MINUSMA completed the rehabilitation of the camps of the Operational Coordination Mechanism in Kidal and Timbuktu through infrastructure enhancements and security improvements. While the Mission stands ready to provide logistical support for the launch of mixed patrols in Kidal and Timbuktu, the operationalization

of the Operational Coordination Mechanism in both locations is still pending owing to disagreements between the signatory armed groups on the modalities.

17. To limit the recruitment of at-risk youth and combatants who are not eligible to participate in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, the Mission implemented 17 ongoing community violence reduction projects, including vocational training and infrastructure rehabilitation, during the reporting period in Kidal, Gao, Timbuktu, Ménaka, Taoudenni and Mopti Regions. An evaluation of the 89 completed projects in the same regions showed that they had a positive impact on intercommunity reconciliation and provided direct socioeconomic benefits to 237,822 beneficiaries, including 114,263 women.

18. From 15 to 27 January, MINUSMA conducted Operation Furaji in the tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger to protect civilians and prevent the return of armed elements to inhabited areas. The operation involved human rights monitoring, reconnaissance, patrolling, medical and veterinary outreach activities and engagement with community leaders. MINUSMA conducted Operation Foronto from 4 to 15 March in the central region, with a focus on supporting the access of the MINUSMA civilian pillars to remote places like Dioura and Macina.

19. During the reporting period, the Mission conducted Operation Farrier to monitor and restrict the movements and equipment of the armed groups. The operation was part of the agreement by the Technical Commission on Security to enforce additional control measures for the signatory armed groups in order to ensure their compliance with the terms of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali and reduce the free circulation of arms.

B. Support for the Malian defence and security forces

20. MINUSMA, in cooperation with other international partners, continued to support the Malian authorities' efforts to combat terrorism and transnational organized crime, including through technical assistance on evidence collection, crime scene management and mobile data analysis for the Malian Specialized Judicial Unit against Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime. For the first time since the operationalization of the unit, individuals charged with terrorism-related acts investigated by the unit were brought to trial before the Court of Appeal of Bamako, with four out of six defendants arrested in Mopti and Kidal Regions in 2015 and 2016 sentenced to prison terms and two acquitted. The United Nations is also finalizing a project aimed at improving the security conditions of detention for suspected terrorists and other high-risk detainees at the Bamako central prison.

21. In line with the memorandum of understanding between MINUSMA and the Government on the Mission's support for the Malian armed forces, the Mission provided three casualty and medical evacuations and conducted regular patrols with defence and security personnel. The Mission shared information with the Malian defence and security forces, within the limits of its mandate, specifically for the protection of civilians and for the safety and security of United Nations and associated personnel. The Mission also began to revise the memorandum of understanding to include operational and technical aspects of support, in addition to capacity-building.

22. MINUSMA and partners trained 1,279 members, including 204 women, of the Malian security forces from Mopti, Timbuktu, Gao and Bamako on various policing modules and respecting human rights in countering terrorism. On 9 February, thanks to advocacy efforts by MINUSMA and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the Director General of the national police nominated 26 gender focal points for the country. On 16 March, MINUSMA completed an eight-month weapons and ammunition management training cycle,

through which 147 Malian defence and security forces were trained as ammunition depot and armoury storekeepers, inspectors and managers.

23. On 26 February, the President signed a decree approving the national policy and action plan on preventing and combating violent extremism and terrorism for 2018-2020, drafted with the support of the Mission, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. The Government has committed to funding 33 per cent of the priority projects for 2018, while advocacy efforts continue to mobilize the remaining funding requirements.

24. Since 16 December, the Mission has trained 87 Malian defence and security personnel in explosive-threat mitigation. The courses provide Malian forces with the skills required to plan and execute explosive ordnance disposal operations and to actively search for and detect improvised explosive devices.

C. Other political developments

25. On 24 December, the former President of Mali, Amadou Toumani Touré, returned for the first time to Mali from Senegal where he had been living in exile since 2012. The former President was welcomed in Bamako by the then Prime Minister, Abdoulaye Idrissa Maïga, other ministers and political party leaders. He has publicly stated that he does not intend to run for public office.

26. On 16 January, at the Mission's initiative, a delegation of women representing the signatory armed groups and civil society met with the president of the Agreement Monitoring Committee, the High Representative of the President for the peace process and MINUSMA to advocate their inclusion in the peace process. Engagement with the signatory parties is ongoing for women's inclusion in the mechanisms supporting the implementation of the Agreement.

27. The commissions established between the signatory movements during the talks in Anéfis in October 2017 held several meetings, but have yet to produce a tangible impact on the peace process. From 6 to 8 February, the signatory groups met in Amassine, Kidal Region, where they agreed to conduct joint patrols in Anéfis and Aguelhok.

28. The social climate remained calm throughout the reporting period, as the Government fostered a constructive dialogue with trade unions and civil society organizations, some of which had opposed the constitutional referendum.

29. On 29 January, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2374 (2017) concerning Mali adopted guidelines for the conduct of its work, in accordance with paragraph 9 (d) of the aforementioned resolution. During the Committee's first informal consultations, held on 5 February, the Panel of Experts on Mali was introduced to the Committee. The experts visited Mali in February.

D. Regional developments

30. During the reporting period, a number of high-level meetings sought to advance the operationalization and define the institutional framework of the G-5 Sahel joint force. Following a summit convened by the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, in La Celle-Saint-Cloud, France, on 13 December to discuss financing modalities for the joint force, G-5 Sahel foreign affairs, defence and development ministers announced the creation of a G-5 Sahel trust fund in Bamako on 8 January. In addition, in resolution 2391 (2017), the Security Council noted with appreciation the proposal by the European Union to channel contributions to the force through its African Peace

Facility. The need for complementarity of funding mechanisms was emphasized during a meeting of G-5 Sahel defence ministers hosted by France on 15 January, while timelines for the deployment of the joint force were validated at the fourth summit of the G-5 Sahel Heads of State, held in Niamey on 6 February, which also saw the transfer of the G-5 Sahel presidency from Mali to the Niger.

31. Meanwhile, tripartite negotiations on United Nations support for the joint force, which were held in January and February in Niamey, Bamako and Nouakchott, concluded with the signing of a technical arrangement by the G-5 Sahel, the United Nations and the European Union on 23 February in the margins of the International High-Level Conference on the Sahel, organized by the European Union in Brussels. The technical arrangement outlines the modalities of the Mission's support, comprising medical and casualty evacuation and engineering and logistical support, at an estimated total cost of €44 million. A total of €414 million was pledged in support of the joint force, including pledges made during the conference in Brussels. Of the total, €10 million was contributed by the European Union through a separate financial agreement, also signed in Brussels, to provide for MINUSMA support for the joint force under the technical arrangement. G-5 Sahel member States committed to adopt a robust human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework. They expressed concern, however, over the long-term sustainability and predictability of funding and reiterated their request to the Security Council to provide a mandate for the joint force under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations.

32. From mid to late January, the G-5 Sahel force led Operation Pagnali in central Mali. This operation targeted a terrorist cell along the border between Burkina Faso and Mali and reportedly resulted in neutralizing several terrorist elements.

33. The Mission remained an active participant in the Committee for Cooperation in Mali, a periodic conference convened by the commanders of the Malian armed forces, the G-5 Sahel force, Operation Barkhane and the European Union training mission to address operational coordination issues, share intelligence within respective mandates and harmonize plans.

III. Major security developments

34. The security situation worsened during the reporting period, and attacks against MINUSMA and the Malian defence and security forces intensified. The Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims appears to have continued to improve its operational capacity and expand its area of operations, notably in the regions of Mopti and Ségou. An increase in the lethality of attacks was observed between 2016 and 2017. Indeed, while the number of attacks with improvised explosive devices remained relatively stable, with 139 incidents recorded in 2016 and 130 in 2017, the number of casualties increased substantially, from 70 killed and 184 injured in 2016 to 141 killed and 309 injured in 2017.

A. Asymmetric and other attacks

35. The security situation in northern and central Mali remains of grave concern. Mopti and Ségou Regions, together with Koulikoro Region, suffered as many attacks as the five northern regions combined. A series of attacks in Ségou, Timbuktu and Ménaka Regions that resulted in dozens of deaths between 25 and 28 January led the President to declare three days of national mourning. The first of these attacks targeted the camp of the Malian armed forces near Diabali, Ségou Region. Attacks in the Nampala-Diabali area contributed to decreasing morale among the defence and security forces, demonstrations by soldiers' families protesting against their

redeployment to the camp and the desertion and subsequent arrest of 36 gendarmes on 17 January. These grave developments call into question the ability of the Government to protect the population and its armed forces in the area. The surge of Malian troops in central Mali announced by the Government on 11 February has not yet translated into an improvement in the security situation.

36. During the reporting period, terrorist groups conducted 63 attacks — 37 against the Malian defence and security forces, 20 against MINUSMA, 5 against a signatory armed group and 3 against Operation Barkhane (some attacks involved more than one target) — in comparison with 71 attacks during the previous reporting period. The highest number of attacks was carried out in Mopti Region (24), followed by Kidal (16), Gao (8), Timbuktu (5), Ségou (4), Ménaka (3) and Koulikoro (3). The Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims was particularly active in Gao, Kidal and Ménaka Regions and claimed responsibility for most of the attacks conducted during the reporting period. There were fewer casualties: 4 peacekeepers were killed and 12 were injured, and 1 MINUSMA contractor was killed (none were injured), whereas in the previous reporting period 11 peacekeepers had been killed and 44 injured. Of the personnel in the Operation Barkhane forces, two were killed and four were injured in the current reporting period, while three had been injured in the previous period.

37. Malian forces were the most heavily targeted and saw an increase in the number of victims: 45 soldiers were killed and 80 injured, compared with 23 killed and 8 injured in the previous period. Attacks against the Malian security and defence forces were most heavily concentrated in Mopti (17), followed by Gao (5), Ségou (4), Timbuktu (3), Koulikoro (2) and Ménaka (2). The attacks most often involved small arms fire, but also improvised explosive devices or mines, or a combination of small arms fire and explosive devices (complex attacks). In addition, 20 members of the signatory armed groups were killed and 12 were injured in terrorist attacks, whereas during the previous reporting period, 2 members of the signatory armed groups had been killed and there had been no reported injuries.

38. On 1 February, the Malian military Chief of Staff signed a military order prohibiting the circulation of motorcycles and pick-up trucks in 12 districts located in Mopti, Ségou and Timbuktu Regions. The measure aims at improving security, and ultimately ensuring the free circulation of people and merchandise. On 6 February, the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA) issued a communiqué denouncing this measure, arguing that the ban was having a heavy impact on the livelihood of local populations. The order, initially applicable only to Niafunké district in Timbuktu Region, was later adopted by the Governor of Timbuktu on 21 February and extended to the other cities in the region as of 1 March.

39. The most active terrorist groups during the reporting period were Islamic State in the Greater Sahara on the border with the Niger and the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims in central Mali and on the borders with Mauritania and Burkina Faso. The latter remained active on social media and claimed responsibility for at least seven attacks perpetrated in January 2018 against MINUSMA, the Malian defence and security forces and the police of Burkina Faso. There were also growing concerns over cooperation between the two groups. On 15 January, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara issued a threat that they would work jointly with Al-Qaida to counter the deployment of the G-5 Sahel joint force.

B. Protection of civilians

40. In the centre of Mali, the protective environment further deteriorated over the reporting period. The expansion of the presence of radical groups facilitated their campaign of intimidation, targeted kidnappings and assassinations. They fuelled

intercommunity tensions and violence, notably between Fulani and Dogon, while their attacks against national and international forces resulted in an unprecedented number of civilian casualties.

41. As many as 71 civilians were killed and 22 were wounded in targeted attacks and intercommunity conflicts during the reporting period. While all districts of Mopti Region were affected, about a third of the casualties were recorded in Douentza district, where the targeted killing of a Dogon Qur'anic teacher in Mondoro commune on 30 December sparked a series of violent events. The most lethal incidents occurred on 15 January, when up to 12 members of the Dogon community were killed, and on 17 January, when eight members of the Fulani community were killed in Dogon-led reprisals. While Malian security forces had arrested a number of Fulani individuals following the assassinations of Dogon community members, they reportedly did not attempt to stop the subsequent arson of Fulani homes.

42. During the reporting period, the regional reconciliation teams, established by the Ministry of National Reconciliation, began operating. The Mopti team facilitated a local reconciliation process, with the support of an international non-governmental organization and of a local reconciliation commission. It also organized intercommunity meetings in areas that had been affected by heavy violence in June 2017 and January 2018, respectively. In January, MINUSMA carried out two missions to Djenné district to assess the situation, appease tensions and liaise with stakeholders on the ground following repeated incursions by radical armed elements.

43. Five incidents involving improvised explosive devices in Mopti Region caused the deaths of 36 civilians and wounded 18 others, including on 25 January when a civilian vehicle hit such a device in Douentza district, killing all 26 passengers aboard. Malian forces were probably the target of three of these incidents, while MINUSMA troops were the likely target on 25 January, as their convoy was expected to pass along the same route. Five days earlier the quick-reaction force had defused an improvised explosive device in the same area, been ambushed and arrested 13 suspected assailants who were handed over to the Malian defence and security forces. In addition, three direct fire attacks against Malian forces wounded five civilians in Mopti and Youwarou districts.

44. In Timbuktu Region, instances of intimidation of civilians by radical elements were reported in Niafunké and Goundam districts. Following inter- and intracommunity tensions linked to longstanding land disputes in Alafia and Lafia communes, MINUSMA worked closely with national authorities and humanitarian partners, including through joint civilian missions to a disputed island (Iloa) and to Houndou Bongo Koyna, where displaced people from the island had moved. Reports of banditry, especially on the Timbuktu-Douentza axis, flowed in steadily. From 15 to 29 January, as part of Operation Furaji, the MINUSMA force carried out patrols to deter banditry in the area.

45. In Ménaka Region, MINUSMA contributed to the establishment of coordinated patrols, including all the signatory and splinter armed groups present in the area. These coordinated patrols have played an important role in building confidence between armed groups and have decreased the reported incidence of armed banditry and other types of violence that affect civilians in the city. South of Ménaka and along the border with the Niger, incursions by armed elements and operations by Operation Barkhane reportedly led to civilian displacement. Severe access constraints hindered both situational awareness and MINUSMA action.

IV. Human rights situation

46. During the reporting period, MINUSMA documented 133 cases of human rights violations and abuses, involving at least 483 victims, compared with 170 cases and 326 victims in the previous reporting period. There were, inter alia, 18 cases of extrajudicial execution or other arbitrary killing, 18 cases of abduction or enforced disappearance, 6 cases of torture or ill-treatment and 18 cases of unlawful detention. Malian defence and security forces were involved in 33 violations (25 per cent of all cases). Signatory groups (55 cases), non-signatory or splinter groups (6 cases), and violent extremist groups (37 cases) were responsible for a total of 98 cases (74 per cent of all cases reported).

47. Nearly two thirds of cases occurred in Mopti and Ségou Regions (38 per cent) and Timbuktu Region (25 per cent), followed by Bamako district (16 per cent) and Gao Region (14 per cent); other regions accounted for less than 7 per cent of the remaining cases. Civilian State representatives and local notabilities accused of being close to Malian defence and security forces were victims of at least three killings and eight abductions by elements affiliated with the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims and other groups affiliated to Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb.

48. Counter-terrorism operations continued to raise grave human rights concerns. On 21 February, in the context of Operation Dambe, Malian armed forces arbitrarily arrested at least 10 civilians in Sokolo and Dioura communes, Ségou Region, 7 of whom were summarily executed, and 3 of whom remain missing. In a 27 February communiqué, the Government acknowledged that civilians had been killed during the operation, and vowed to conduct an investigation and to uphold human rights and humanitarian law standards. During the reporting period, the Malian authorities arrested 116 individuals in connection with the conflict, of whom 80 were arrested on terrorism-related charges (all adult men). As at 28 February, 17 had been released. Among those arrested on terrorism-related charges during the reporting period, more than half were subjected to human rights violations: 15 persons were victims of extrajudicial execution or enforced disappearance, 14 of torture or ill-treatment, and 15 of illegal detention.

49. During the reporting period, 696 additional individuals provided statements to the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, bringing the total to 7,588 depositions since 3 January 2017. On 23 January, the International Commission of Inquiry on Mali was formally established. The Commission will investigate allegations of abuse and serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law committed between January 2012 and January 2018 and will submit its report to my office by January 2019.

50. On 1 February, MINUSMA published a report on human rights and the peace process. While focusing on 2016/17, the report captures patterns of human rights abuses that continue to this day, including the high number of cases of abuse by armed groups. The report was used by the Mission to discuss human rights and the fight against impunity with the authorities and the signatory movements.

51. On 14 February, MINUSMA held a workshop in Kidal with seven CMA focal points on conflict-related sexual violence to validate the CMA plan on prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence. The approved plan contains time-bound activities to be implemented by CMA, with MINUSMA support, including monitoring and reporting on the implementation process.

52. The country task force on monitoring and reporting verified 48 grave violations against children since 16 December. Seven children were killed and one was maimed in Mopti and Gao; two boys were separated from an unidentified armed group and are

following a reintegration program in Gao; at least seven children were abducted in two incidents; there were two cases of attacks against schools and hospitals; and 29 cases of denial of humanitarian access were verified. Advocacy efforts continued for the release of three children detained at a Government-run detention centre in Bamako. In addition, the task force is currently investigating allegations of five children reportedly killed by unidentified armed elements in Mopti Region.

53. On 21 December, the Mission and CMA agreed on a timeline of activities and an implementation strategy for the action plan to end and prevent grave violations against children. The Mission also continued its dialogue with the Platform coalition of armed groups to prevent and put an end to such violations.

V. Humanitarian situation

54. The humanitarian situation continued to worsen owing to insecurity in northern and central Mali and limited State presence. While the Humanitarian Response Plan 2018, launched in Bamako on 14 February, seeks to provide life-saving and protection assistance to 1.56 million people, as of 10 March, only 4 per cent of the $263 million required had been received. The $8 million made available through the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund for 2018 was allocated to life-saving activities in the sectors of food security, nutrition and water, sanitation and hygiene.

55. During the reporting period, 41 security incidents, mostly involving the break-in of compounds and vehicle thefts, affected humanitarian actors, compared with 27 cases in the previous reporting period. On 1 February, a humanitarian worker was shot and killed in Gao under circumstances that remain to be determined.

56. The already dire food and nutrition situation could deteriorate further owing to a looming agropastoral crisis. Insufficient rains in 2017 have affected the food security of people and livestock in the regions of Gao, Kayes, Mopti, Ségou and Sikasso. Across Mali, 4.1 million people are expected to be food insecure, of whom 800,000 are expected to need emergency food assistance, during the 2018 lean season (June to September).

57. As of January 2018, the Government had registered 47,700 internally displaced persons, 589,600 internally displaced and refugee returnees, and 554 asylum seekers from various countries, compared with 40,600 internally displaced persons, 577,438 returnees and 490 asylum seekers in November 2017. While Mali hosts 17,039 refugees from various countries, more than 131,800 Malian refugees remain in neighbouring countries.

58. On 1 February, the Government endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, expressing its support for the protection of education. However, insecurity continued to have a dramatic impact on the education system. As of March 2018, 715 schools were closed in Kidal, Gao, Ménaka, Timbuktu, Mopti and Ségou Regions owing to insecurity, including threats and attacks from violent extremists. As a result, 214,500 children were denied access to education.

59. The United Nations and its partners provided access to safe water for 22,800 people in Gao and Timbuktu Regions and treated more than 13,950 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition. A total of 343 cases were recorded in the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System, of which 63 per cent were cases of sexual violence. Almost all survivors received medical and psychological support.

VI. Economic development and cultural preservation

60. The rate of economic growth in Mali fell slightly from 5.8 to 5.3 per cent between 2016 and 2017, owing to the persistent fragility of the security situation, political uncertainty and a drop in agricultural production caused by low rainfall in 2017. However, real GDP growth is expected to average 5 per cent in 2018–2019, driven by steady donor support and growth in public investment and agricultural production.

61. As part of a series of reforms undertaken by the West African Economic and Monetary Union to increase transparency, efficiency and accountability, in 2018 the Government switched to an outcome-driven budget regime. In the 2018 budget, grants from international institutions and foreign governments amount to $229 million, against $405 million in the 2017 revised budget law. As of February 2018, the Government had disbursed approximately $3 billion of the total of $4.24 billion pledged at the International Conference for the Economic Recovery and Development of Mali. On 30 January, the Parliament created the sustainable development fund to provide a guarantee for the specific strategy for the development of the northern regions.

62. In support of the Government's plan for securing the centre of the country, MINUSMA and the United Nations country team initiated several projects to promote social cohesion and support the return of State authority, economic recovery and the provision of basic social services, including through quick-impact projects. New contributions raised the amount in the trust fund for peace and security in Mali from $45.6 million to $62.5 million between September and the end of December 2017. The trust fund is used for key activities in support of peace and security in Mali, including the work of the independent observer.

63. The Peacebuilding Fund provided $3 million in financing for an initiative to promote community security and social cohesion in the Liptako-Gourma region straddling Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, where a large number of terrorist elements operate. Moreover, over $10 million was allocated to Peacebuilding Fund projects that will promote reconciliation, empower women and youth and prevent conflict in Ségou and Mopti Regions.

64. With regard to cultural preservation, MINUSMA and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization continued to raise awareness of the protection of cultural heritage and efforts to combat illicit trafficking in cultural goods.

VII. Mission-wide strategic plan

65. The Mission increased its focus on activities related to its core mandated tasks, including support for the implementation of the Agreement, the restoration and extension of State authority and the Malian defence and security forces. The Mission was updating its strategic plan to reflect key elements that emerged from discussions with the United Nations country team as part of the ongoing strategic review, including the root causes and drivers of the conflict and scenarios for political and other developments in Mali within a two-year period. The strategic review aims to reassess United Nations engagement in the post-election environment in Mali on the basis of current trends in the political, security and operational environment and the effectiveness of the Mission in implementing its present mandate. The review is intended to inform the preparation of my next report to the Security Council and its deliberations on the renewal of the Mission's mandate in June.

VIII. Capacities of the Mission

A. Military

66. The authorized force level of up to 13,289 military personnel comprised 40 military observers, 421 staff officers and 12,828 contingent personnel. As at March, 11,795 personnel had been deployed, or 88.8 per cent of the authorized strength. Women accounted for 2.64 per cent of military personnel.

67. The implementation of the recommendations of the technical review conducted in July 2017 continued, including with progress on camp consolidation measures, the appointment of force protection officers and the finalization of plans to establish permanent medical treatment capabilities in the central region as part of the budget for year 2018/19. The Mission has also proposed that mobile training teams be set up to improve contingent performance.

68. The lack of contingent-owned armoured personnel carriers, including mine-protected vehicles, remained the most critical equipment shortfall. This gap has prevented the Mission from implementing fully a number of its operational tasks, such as patrolling and providing escorts for United Nations logistics convoys. Eight personnel carriers were damaged beyond repair during the reporting period and the number of available troop carriers is decreasing steadily owing to the limited ability of troop-contributing countries to maintain vehicles or replace destroyed vehicles. To address these challenges, two United Nations-owned mine-protected vehicles were loaned to the Bangladeshi infantry battalion to augment the unit's protective posture during operations, and training was provided to troop-contributing countries on the claims process to replace destroyed carriers.

69. The Mission considers the deployment of the quick-reaction force's remaining vehicles and aviation assets to be an immediate operational necessity. Failure to address the current shortfall in medium-utility helicopters in the centre, west, north and east (from June 2018) of the country will prevent the Mission from fully executing intelligence-driven, force-directed operations to locate and disrupt terrorist groups that are threatening civilians and United Nations and associated personnel and from contributing effectively to stabilization in the centre and north of Mali.

70. Combat convoy capabilities were strengthened towards the end of 2017 and, at time of writing the present report, the new arrivals were proceeding towards full operational capability. The first company and headquarters elements of the Egyptian convoy battalion arrived in late October 2017. Despite the initial challenges faced in carrying out autonomous convoys and escorts, the first convoy was conducted on 7 February with a reduced number of vehicles. The deployment of the Sri Lankan convoy company was completed on 12 January, and it reached full operational capability on 18 February. With two operational combat convoy companies, it is expected that MINUSMA will be able to free two infantry companies within one month.

B. Police

71. On 15 March, 1,737 personnel, or 90.5 per cent of the authorized strength, were deployed, with 306 (88.7 per cent) individual police officers, of whom 16.5 per cent were women, and 1,431 (90.9 per cent) formed police unit personnel, of whom 4.7 per cent were women. MINUSMA police continued to require 12 armoured personnel carriers for formed police units and 6 additional armoured vehicles for individual police officers. The Mission also requires individual police officers with specialized expertise, including in the fields of forensics, investigations, riverine police capacity,

security sector reform, counter-terrorism, serious organized crime, illicit trafficking, strategic planning and project management.

C. Civilian personnel

72. As of 12 March, 81 per cent of all MINUSMA civilian staff had been deployed, including 82 per cent of international staff, 83 per cent of United Nations Volunteers and 81 per cent of national staff. Women held 25 per cent of the international posts, 30 per cent of United Nations Volunteer positions and 19 per cent of national staff posts.

73. On 3 January, MINUSMA finalized an action plan on gender parity with a view to improving performance in recruiting and retaining women at the Mission, including through the establishment of a mentoring system.

D. Camp construction and securing supply routes

74. In Gao, 110 civilian staff and a Chinese force protection unit comprising 170 military personnel were relocated from Camp Elevage to the super camp, as per a recommendation of the board of inquiry following three separate attacks perpetrated against MINUSMA in Gao city on 31 May 2016.

75. As part of the consolidation of MINUSMA premises in Bamako, 314 personnel moved from the logistics base to the Mission operations base in late December 2017. The Mission saved approximately $81,000 per month in rent as a result of the move.

76. The rehabilitation of the Gao runway is 31 per cent completed and on track for the scheduled completion on 30 June 2018. Due to increased security threats in Diabali, Ségou Region, the Mission is improving its defence infrastructure for the MINUSMA camp.

E. Environment

77. As part of the implementation of its environmental action plan, MINUSMA ensured the proper collection and treatment of solid and biomedical waste in all deployment sites. It also continued efforts to improve wastewater management, including by commissioning wastewater treatment plants in Kidal, and conducted inspections in Gao, Bamako, Kidal and Aguelhok to monitor the Mission's environmental footprint.

IX. Safety and security of United Nations personnel

78. In response to the report issued in December 2017 by Lieutenant General (Retired) dos Santos Cruz, whom I appointed to lead a review on improving the security of United Nations peacekeepers, MINUSMA identified nine measures to improve the training and equipment of its troops and conveyed clear guidance on the need to adopt a more robust posture at all levels. Examples of those measures include ensuring that escort convoys are equipped with counter-improvised explosive device capabilities and that troops are provided with predeployment and in-mission training. In addition, MINUSMA has deployed early warning capabilities to the Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu camps and plans to also deploy these capabilities to the Mopti and Ménaka camps.

79. As the security situation remains a significant challenge for all United Nations personnel involved in programme delivery, the Mission continued to adjust its defensive plans to the elevated threat level, including through the reinforcement of camp perimeters and the construction of bunkers, observation posts and blast protection walls. Safe havens and bunkers were completed in the Gao camp, while the construction of overhead protection for sleeping units for camps in Gao, Kidal, Ménaka, Mopti and Tessalit is still in progress. The Mission initiated the construction of base defence operations centres to coordinate integrated defence procedures among the different components responsible for the camps' protection and is in the process of installing closed-circuit television systems throughout MINUSMA camps. In addition, MINUSMA provided training on improvised explosive device threat mitigation for 83 logistic convoy commanders.

80. Medical evacuation procedures were improved through the delegation of authority to the sectors to activate medical evacuation flights for pre-planned tactical and combat operations. However, aeromedical evacuation teams from Member States were still required for Ménaka and Tessalit, which were supported by teams from other locations. Improvements to airfield infrastructure to enhance medical evacuation capabilities at night continued to progress in Gao, Timbuktu, Kidal and Tessalit.

81. MINUSMA established a secure communication network to support the Mission's intelligence-related capacities in three locations with a planned expansion to two additional sector headquarters. Medium-altitude long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicles were in operation in Timbuktu, providing information and analysis capability. As a complement to the camp surveillance system in Kidal, one tactical unmanned aerial vehicle was deployed to provide extended surveillance beyond the camp perimeter, complementing the closed-circuit television surveillance system currently being established in the main United Nations premises. The Mission's intelligence and information infrastructure is designed to increase awareness of and the early detection of threats to civilians and to ensure the protection of MINUSMA camps and associated personnel.

X. Conduct and discipline

82. During the reporting period, one allegation of sexual abuse was reported. MINUSMA referred the matter to the Office of Internal Oversight Services for investigation. Administrative measures were taken pending the outcome of the investigation. Two allegations received in 2017 are pending investigation by the relevant troop-contributing country and the Office of Internal Oversight Services. MINUSMA continued to combat sexual exploitation and abuse through enforcement measures, assistance to victims, training and outreach activities to inform personnel and the local population about the United Nations zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse.

XI. Observations

83. Months before the holding of the presidential election on 29 July, I remain deeply concerned at the slow pace of implementation of the timeline adopted by the Agreement Monitoring Committee on 16 January, the deterioration in the extant security situation and its adverse impact on the elections, as well as on the operational environment of the Mission. Despite the importance of the elections scheduled thus far, the parties must not lose sight of their responsibilities vis-à-vis the implementation of the Agreement.

84. The appointment by President Keita of Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga as Prime Minister on 30 December has provided an opportunity to reinvigorate the peace process. I note the Prime Minister's initiative in adopting a road map to operationalize the timeline adopted on 16 January. The United Nations, including MINUSMA, and the international community will continue to support the parties in the implementation of key outstanding provisions of the Agreement. Progress in priority areas of the Agreement, including decentralization, security sector reform and cantonment, as well as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes, will be crucial to advance the peace process. Short-term gains in these areas must be consolidated in support of the broader objectives of national reconciliation, economic development, good governance and the building of a resilient and inclusive society to pave way for sustainable peace in Mali. I call for the inclusion of women and young people in all the mechanisms supporting the implementation of the Agreement, as well as in the interim authorities.

85. The restoration and extension of State authority remain a priority for the effective protection of civilians and the delivery of long-awaited peace dividends to conflict-affected communities. I welcome the recent appointments of government officials, particularly prefects and sub-prefects for the northern and central regions. I exhort the Government to provide the newly appointed officials with appropriate resources to ensure their effective and rapid deployment to and establishment in their respective duty stations. The Government is also encouraged to fill the remaining vacant positions in the territorial administration, including by considering more women and candidates from various regions. MINUSMA will continue to support the redeployment and extension of the State, including through technical assistance and capacity-building. I appeal to the technical and financial partners of Mali to support this process.

86. I call on the Government, opposition political parties and the signatory armed groups to ensure that peaceful elections are held throughout Mali, including in the north. The Government's engagement with the signatory armed groups and efforts to strengthen dialogue with majority and opposition political parties will contribute to achieving this objective.

87. The United Nations will continue to support the reconciliation and justice measures of the Agreement, including the International Commission of Inquiry to investigate serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law committed in Mali since January 2012. On 23 January, I appointed the three members of this Commission, established at the request of the parties, and look forward to its report.

88. The assumption of duty of the Carter Center as independent observer and its establishment of a presence office in Mali are welcome developments. I hope the forthcoming first report of the observer will help to reinvigorate the peace process and underline the parties' responsibilities.

89. The security situation, in particular acts of terrorism against innocent civilians, and its adverse impact on livelihoods, access to basic services and the delivery of humanitarian assistance and development programming, remains a source of deep concern. The deteriorating security situation in Mali continues to threaten regional stability in the Sahel. It is urgent to step up efforts to counter asymmetric threats, particularly improvised explosives devices or mines, which are killing an increased number of civilians. I strongly condemn the terrorist attack near the border with Burkina Faso on 26 January, which killed at least 26 persons, including women and children. I call on the Government to seek and bring to justice the perpetrators of such acts and express my heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families of the victims as well as the Governments and peoples of the countries concerned. I note the visit of

the Panel of Experts of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2374 (2017) concerning Mali; the Council will consider the Panel's report in due course.

90. I equally remain deeply concerned about the situation in the central regions, where attacks and human rights violations persist. The increased presence of Malian defence and security forces in central Mali is essential to protecting the population, as well as promoting reconciliation among communities. In this regard, I welcome the visit of the Prime Minister to Mopti on 11 February and all the initiatives taken thus far to better coordinate activities and interventions in support of the Government's multidimensional and integrated strategy for the centre. The United Nations system in Mali and donors will continue to support this strategy, while MINUSMA pursues it efforts towards the full deployment of the Senegalese quick-reaction force.

91. I remain committed to supporting the G-5 Sahel joint force and urge Member States and international organizations to continue to contribute to the force's full operationalization. I commend the Member States who pledged to support the force at the International High-Level Conference on the Sahel, held in Brussels on 23 February, and invite them to release the funds pledged without delay. I welcome the conclusion of the technical agreement requested by the Security Council in resolution 2391 (2017). I look forward to presenting an update on the United Nations support for the G-5 Sahel joint force in my report that will be issued in May.

92. I welcome the growing ownership of security- and development-related initiatives taken by the G-5 Sahel. While I recognize the importance of conducting military operations against terrorist networks and organized criminals, including drug traffickers and people smugglers, the situation in the Sahel region merits a multidimensional approach that includes creating job opportunities for young people and ensuring accountability for serious crimes, such as terrorist acts, that destabilize the peace process.

93. MINUSMA peacekeepers continue to be targeted by attacks that are increasing in complexity and lethality. In this context, I note the importance of the comprehensive recommendations put forward in the report on improving the security of United Nations peacekeepers to reduce fatalities and injuries. The Secretariat has developed an action plan and stands ready to support MINUSMA, including by providing additional equipment and predeployment training. I am pleased to note that the Mission has started to implement the recommendations, including those of its military technical review. I urge Member States to also support the implementation of the report's recommendations.

94. I strongly encourage the Government to intensify its efforts to expand the delivery of basic social services in northern and central Mali and to advance gender equality. I commend the humanitarian actors who operate in a very challenging environment to assist people in need in Mali. I urge all the relevant parties to respect international humanitarian law, human rights law and the humanitarian principles, allow the unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need and protect humanitarian workers and other civilians, especially children. I also urge international partners to fund the Humanitarian Response Plan 2018 to avoid a further deterioration of the situation.

95. The Mission's capability gaps continue to affect its operations and the safety and security of the personnel. Given the growing asymmetric threats in the operational environment, I call on troop- and police-contributing countries to provide their contingents with adequate predeployment training and equipment, including mine-protected vehicles, to mitigate the risks that they take to protect civilians, as well as to limit caveats with regard to their engagement and posture, in order to

strengthen integration and mutual protection. I call on Member States to continue to support United Nations peacekeeping, including through bilateral support to MINUSMA troop- and police-contributing countries.

96. Ahead of the renewal of the mandate of MINUSMA, I look forward to the outcome of the Mission's ongoing strategic review, which will help to redefine strategies to respond to the multiple challenges outlined herein.

97. Finally, I pay tribute to the men and women of MINUSMA, under the leadership of the Special Representative, Annadif Mahamat Saleh. The relentless efforts of the staff to support the peace process under extremely difficult conditions will bear fruit. I wish to express my gratitude to the international mediation team, including the lead mediator Algeria, agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations, regional and subregional organizations, including the African Union, the European Union, the G-5 Sahel and the Economic Community of West African States, non-governmental organizations and all other partners for their continued support towards the restoration of peace and stability in Mali.

Annex I

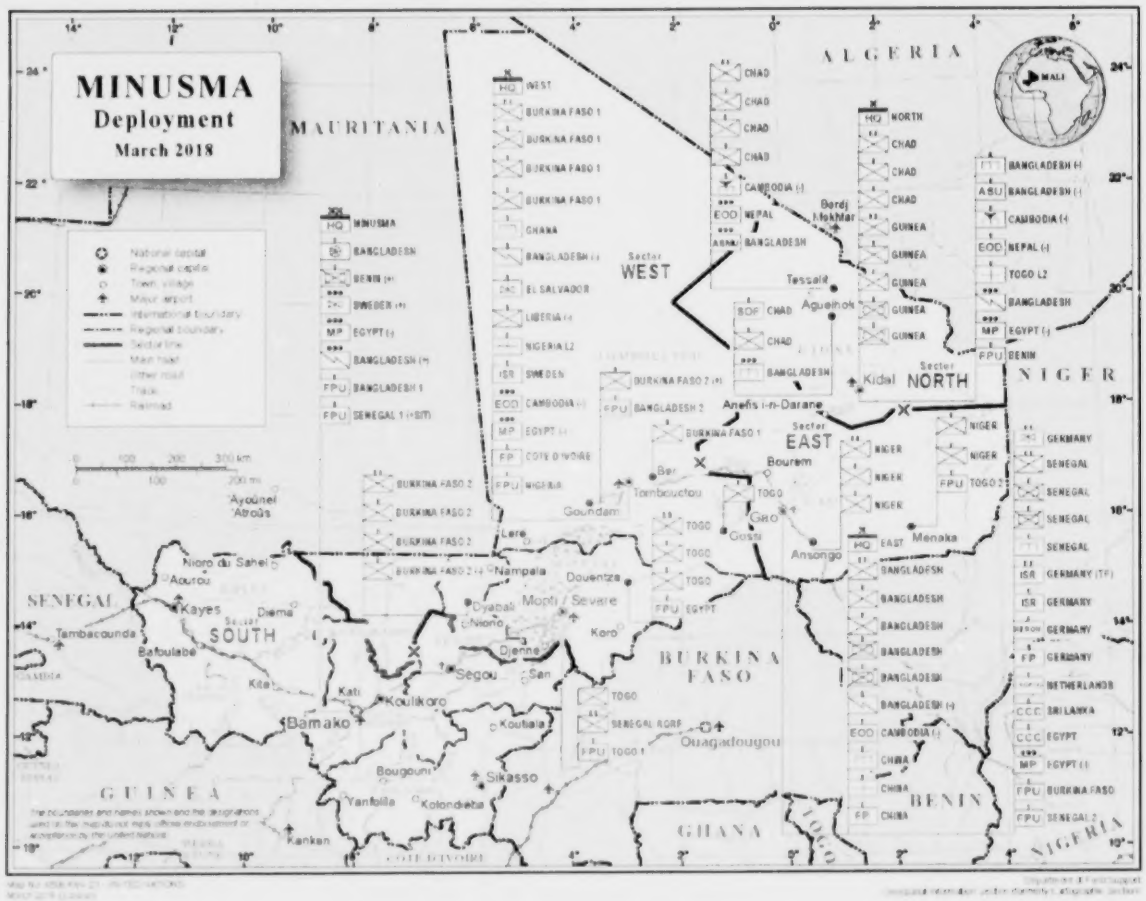
Military and police strength of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali as at 15 March 2018

	Military			*Police*								
	Staff officers and units			*Individual police officers*			*Formed police units*			*Total police*		
Country	*Men*	*Women*	*Total*	*Men*	*Women*	*Total*	*Men*	*Women*	*Total*	*Men*	*Women*	*Total*
Armenia	1		1									
Austria	2		2									
Bangladesh	1 381	14	1 395				279		279	279		279
Belgium	18	1	19									
Benin	258	2	260	21	2	23	140		140	161	2	163
Bhutan	4		4									
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2		2									
Burkina Faso	1 655	68	1 723	22	6	28	133	6	139	155	12	167
Burundi		1	1									
Cambodia	277	25	302									
Cameroon	2	1	3	13	4	17				13	4	17
Chad	1 446	2	1 448	14	5	19				14	5	19
China	389	14	403									
Côte d'Ivoire	154	4	158	13	4	17				13	4	17
Czechia	3	1	4									
Denmark	1		1									
Egypt	337		337	3		3	139		139	142		142
El Salvador	93	11	104									
Estonia	9		9									
Ethiopia	1		1									
Finland	5		5	5	1	6				5	1	6
France	25		25	6	1	7				6	1	7
Gambia	4		4									
Germany	544	15	559	9	2	11				9	2	11
Ghana	164		164									
Guatemala	2		2									
Guinea	852	11	863	13	12	25				13	12	25
Hungary				1		1				1		1
Indonesia	9		9									
Italy	1	1	2									
Jordan	9		9	9		9				9		9
Kenya	8	3	11									
Latvia	3		3									
Liberia	73	7	80									
Lithuania	5		5									
Madagascar				1		1				1		1

	Military			Police								
	Staff officers and units			Individual police officers			Formed police units			Total police		
Country	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Mauritania	6		6									
Nepal	147	4	151									
Netherlands	197	14	211	4	2	6				4	2	6
Niger	855	8	863	18	11	29				18	11	29
Nigeria	70	16	86	2	5	7	125	14	139	127	19	146
Norway	14	1	15									
Pakistan	2		2									
Portugal	2		2	1		1				1		1
Romania	1		1	6		6				6		6
Senegal	1 042	14	1 056	28		28	286	29	315	314	29	343
Sierra Leone	8	2	10									
Spain	1		1	2		2				2		2
Sri Lanka	207		207									
Sweden	257	31	288	2		2				2		2
Switzerland	4		4	3		3				3		3
Togo	900	39	939	13		13	262	18	280	275	18	293
Tunisia				36	2	38				36	2	38
Turkey				1		1				1		1
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	2		2									
United States of America	23	4	27									
Yemen	2		2	3		3				3		3
Total	**11 477**	**314**	**11 791**	**249**	**57**	**306**	**1364**	**67**	**1 431**	**1 613**	**124**	**1 737**

Annex II

Map


MINUSMA
Deployment
March 2018
MAURITANIA
ALGERIA
MALI
NIGER
BURKINA FASO
SENEGAL
GUINEA
BENIN
GHANA
NIGERIA
Sector WEST
Sector EAST
Sector NORTH
Sector SOUTH
Aguelhok
Tessalit
Kidal
Anefis i-n-Darane
Tombouctou
Goundam
Gossi
Ansongo
Menaka
Bourem
Mopti / Severe
Douentza
Koro
Djenne
Segou
Koutiala
Ouagadougou
Bamako
Kati
Koulikoro
Sikasso
Bougouni
Yanfolila
Kolondieba
Kayes
Nioro du Sahel
Aourou
Nampala
Dyabali
Nioro
Tambacounda
Kenkan